HERE ARE TALES THAT WILL USHER YOU INTO

THE HAUNT OF FEAR

NO. 27

REPRINT EDITION

FEATURING...

THE OLD WITCH

THE VAULT-KEEPER

THE CRYPT-KEEPER

THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

SOMBER TIME...AND THE LIVIN' IS E.C. ♫ HEE, HEE! THAT'S MY NEW *SCREAM SONG*..FROM *PUKEY* AND *MESS*, BY *GEORGE GUSHIN'*, KIDDIES, WELCOMING YOU TO *THE HAUNT OF FEAR*. THIS IS YOUR *SHIVER CHEF, THE OLD WITCH*, READY TO DISH OUT A *RED, RAW* SLICE OF *RANCID ROT* FROM THE *POT*. THIS *DELIRIUM-DIET* IS A *FAVORITE REEKING RECIPE* OF MINE...A *SUCCULENT SLAB* OF *SWEET-AND-SOUR SLOP* CALLED ...

ABOUT FACE

THE 17TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1666 WAS OMINOUS AND THREATENING. AS IF IT WERE SOME DREADFUL WARNING OF THINGS TO COME. THE OVERCAST SKY WAS PREGNANT WITH RAIN. UPSTAIRS IN HER BED, AMY LORIMER WRITHED AND MOANED, FOR SHE, TOO, WAS READY TO BRING FORTH A STORM. HER HUSBAND, JEFF, PACED THE PARLOR FLOOR ANXIOUSLY, FINALLY PAUSING TO LIGHT THE GAS JET AND THEREBY DISPEL THE GLOOM.

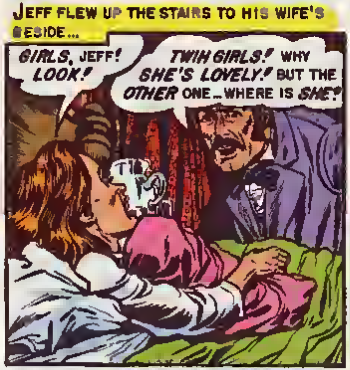
He'd been waiting for the sound.. expecting it. Yet when it finally did come, Jeff stopped..startled. Then it came again...a soft...gentle baby cry. And Jeff smiled wearily...

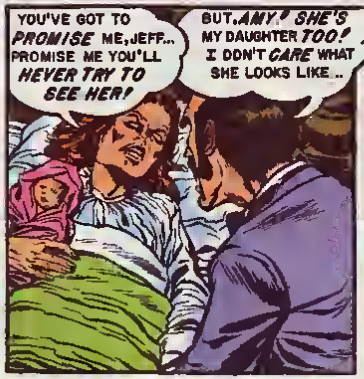
He waited for Mrs. Emerson,now fearing for Amy. The sweat rolled down his face. A few moments later, there was another... a different cry...

It was a raucous cry...vile sounding, Jeff thought. He staggered to the centerhall....clung to the newel post...

Then, both cries blended in a discordant cacophony. Jeff's jaw dropped, and an understanding lighted his face. With wonderment, he watched the grave-faced midwife descend the stairs wearily...

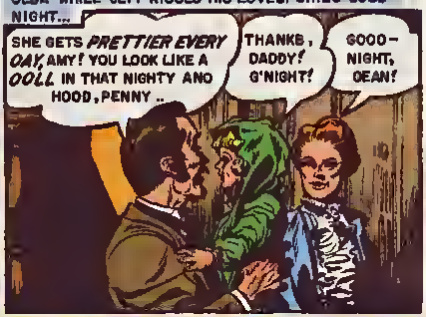
Jeff flew up the stairs to his wife's beside...



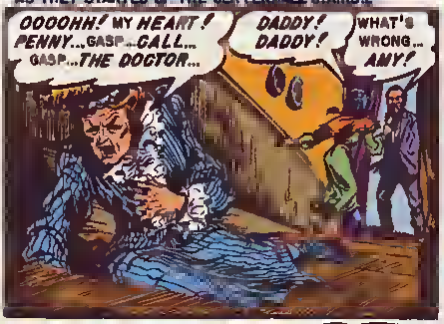


At first, Jeff longed to see his other child whom Amy had named Olga. But Amy kept the nursery doors locked, and Jeff soon accepted her will. Penelope, the pretty one, Jeff proudly wheeled through the park with Amy at his side...

As the years went by, Jeff Lorimer all but forgot there was another child hidden away from the world. Amy protected her secret well, standing guard outside the room Perry shared with Olga while Jeff kissed his lovely child good-night...



It was shortly after Penny and Olga's fifteenth birthday that it happened. Penny, wearing her new birthday bonnet, had just come in with her mother, as they started up the centennial stairs...



Penny hurried to her own room, sobbing, and Jeff waited outside, pale and shaken, while Doctor Bunnows was with Amy. Finally, the good doctor came out, looked sadly at the grief-stricken husband, and shook his head...

Jeff knealt tearfully beside his dying wife. Her voice was barely more than a whisper...

The sky was bleak and ominous the day they buried Amy Lorimer... almost the exact same kind of day she'd brought forth life into the world. Now her life was gone... laid to rest...

AFTER THE FUNERAL, JEFF AND HIS DAUGHTER MADE THEIR SAD LONELY WAY HOME...
WHAT ABOUT OLGA, PENNY?
I'LL TAKE CARE OF HER, DADDY!
PENNY! OLGA IS MY DAUGHTER! I MUST SEE HER! I MUST! I DON'T CARE WHAT SHE LOOKS LIKE...
PLEASE, DADDY! DON'T! IT'S BETTER THIS WAY! YOU COULD NEVER STAND HER... AND I COULDN'T BEAR TO SEE OLGA HURT!
HOW DO YOU KNOW? HOW DO YOU KNOW I COULDN'T STAND TO LOOK UPON HER...
I KNOW, DADDY! AND OLGA KNOWS!
ONE DAY, WHEN PENNY WENT OUT TO DO SOME SHOPPING, JEFF CLIMBED THE STAIRS TO HIS DAUGHTERS' ROOM. HE TRIED THE KNOB...
LOCKED? OLGA? OLGA, OPEN THE DOOR! IT'S YOUR FATHER!
NO SOUND CAME FROM THE ROOM. JEFF LISTENED TO HIS OWN HEART AND HIS OWN HEAVY BREATHING AND KNEW THAT THIS CHILD WHO'D BEEN LOCKED AWAY FOR SO LONG WAS FRIGHTENED... TOO FRIGHTENED...
DON'T BE AFRAID, OLGA! OPEN THE DOOR! I'M YOUR OWN FATHER! I... OH, PENNY!
YOU PROMISED! YOU PROMISED MOTHER YOU'D NEVER TRY TO SEE OLGA! YOU PROMISED...
PENNY STOOD THERE ON THE STAIRS, STARING AT HER FATHER FOR A LONG MOMENT. THEN SHE BRUSHED PAST HIM AND UNLOCKED THE DOOR...
BUT I HAVE A RIGHT TO SEE HER, PENNY! I HAVE A RIGHT... AS A FATHER...
IT'S YOUR MORBID OURIOSITY... THAT'S ALL IT IS! IT ISN'T LOVE!
PENNY SLAMMED THE DOOR AND JEFF STOOD THERE, MUSING OVER HER WORDS. FROM WITHIN CAME THE SOUNDS OF MUFFLED VOICES... WHISPERING...
THEN THE DOOR OPENED. JEFF TURNED... AND SHRANK BACK IN REVULSION...
GOOD... LORD... CHOKE...
4

SHE STEPPED OUT... LEERING AT HIM. SHE WORE A BLACK DRESS THAT SHOWED GREER WITH AGE. IT DRAPED ALL ABOUT HER FEET AND THE SLEEVES HUNG BEYOND HER FINGERTIPS. JEFF RECOGNIZED IT AS AN OLD ONE OF AMY'S . AS WAS THE ANCIENT THREADBARE BONNET THAT FRAMED HER FACE. BUT THAT FACE. THAT *REPULSIVE DISTORTED HIDEOUS FACE DEFIED DESCRIPTION...*

YOU.. CHOKE... YOU ARE *OLGA?*

YES ..I AM OLGA!

JEFF BACKED OFF, HIS STOMACH ROILING. THEN HE TURNED HIS BACK TO HIDE HIS OVERWHELMING DISGUST. OLGA'S WORDS HISSED AT HIM...

I HATE YOU! I HATE *EVERYONE!* EVERYONE BUT *PENNY!* *SHE* DOESN'T CARE IF I'M *UGLY!*

HOW... HOW *CAN* YOU.. CHOKE... HATE A WOMAN YOU'VE NEVER *SEEN?*

BECAUSE *THEY'LL HATE ME...* JUST AS *YOU* HATE ME... FOR *BEING UGLY!* IT MAKES YOU *SICK* TO *LOOK* AT ME, *DOESN'T* IT, MY FATHER? YES, *I HATE YOU...* AND *ALL THE PEOPLE* THAT WILL *TURN THEIR HEADS*, AS *YOU TURN YOURS*. SO *THEY WON'T HAVE TO SEE MY FACE!*

OLGA SLIPPED BACK INTO HER ROOM, AND FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS REMAINED THERE. AND IF THE VERY THOUGHT OF HER MADE JEFF'S FLESH CRAWL, HE AT LEAST FOUND SOLACE IN WALKING AND TALKING WITH PENELOPE...

OLGA NEEDS *LOVE... UNDERSTANDING... AFFECTION...*

HOW *COULD* I, PENNY? *HOW COULD I GIVE IT TO HER?*

IF *SHE* LOOKED LIKE *ME*, YOU COULD *HOLD* HER AND TELL HER YOU *LOVE* HER...

PERHAPS! BUT IT *ISN'T* JUST HER *FACE!* THERE'S AN UGLINESS *INSIDE* HER, *TOO*. I *FEEL* IT...

NO! *NO!* SHE'S *GOOD!* I *KNOW!* SHE'S JUST *AFRAID...*

SHE'S *BITTER* AND *TWISTED* AND *ANGRY* AT THE WORLD..

THERE SHE HAS A *RIGHT TO BE...* IF SHE CAN'T EXPECT ANYTHING *BETTER* FROM HER *OWN FATHER...*

I'M *SORRY*, PENNY! I'LL... I'LL *TRY!* I *REALLY WILL...*

WHEN THEY GOT BACK FROM THEIR WALK, JEFF DECIDED TO TAKE PENNY'S ADVICE...
BRING OLGA DOWN WITH YOU, DEAR.
NO, DADDY! I'D RATHER YOU TALK TO HER ALONE...
PENNY WENT TO HER ROOM AND SOON AFTER, OLGA CAME DOWN DRESSED IN AMY'S OLD GOWN AND SHABBY BONNET. SHE STOOD SNEERING AT HER FATHER...
WELL?
I...I WONDERED IF YOU'D LIKE TO GO TO A NICKELODEON WITH ME, OLGA?
OLGA'S HIDEOUS FACE BRIGHTENED...
YOU...YOU WOULDN'T BE ASHAMED TO TAKE ME?
OF...OF COURSE NOT, OLGA! COME ALONG!
BUT JEFF HAD LIED. HE WAS ASHAMED...ASHAMED OF WHAT THE NEIGHBORS MIGHT THINK...ASHAMED TO HAVE THEM SEE HIS DISGUSTING—LOOKING DAUGHTER...ASHAMED BECAUSE HE FELT THAT WAY. AS THEY LEFT THE HOUSE...
AH... LORIMER...AND PENNY! I...I...GOOD LORD!
THIS...THIS IS MY...MY... MY NIECE...FROM OUT OF TOWN, WILLIAMS!
OLGA TURNED ON HER FATHER, HER FACE EVEN MORE CONTORTED WITH ANGER AND HURT AND DESPAIR...
YOU DENIED IT! YOU DENIED I WAS YOUR DAUGHTER! YOU ARE ASHAMED!
HOW COULD AMY AND I HAVE PRODUCED SUCH A MONSTROSITY!
OLGA RAN, SOBBING, FROM HER FATHER. JEFF WATCHED HER SCURRY UP THE STREET...WATCHED A CHILD VOMIT AT THE SIGHT OF HER... WATCHED THE MOTHER STANDING WITH HIM AT THE CURB LOOK ONCE AGAIN AT HIS HIDEOUS OFFSPRING, THEN TURN AND RETCH HERSELF...
GO ON! TEAR OUT YOUR INSIDES, YOU FILTHY THINGS...
JEFF TURNED AND HURRIED BACK TO THE HOUSE. OLGA WENT ON, SENDING TREMORS OF NAUSEA THROUGH ALL WHO MET HER...HER EYES BURNING WITH HATE FOR THEM. WHEN SOME CHILDREN IN THE STREET SAW HER, THEY SCREAMED AND TURNED TO RUN. OLGA TRIPPED ONE OF THEM...
YOU'LL LOOK UGLIER THAN ME WHEN I GET THROUGH WITH YOU!

SHE SPRANG UPON THE FALLEN CHILD, BRUTALLY CLAWING CHUNKS OF FLESH FROM ITS FACE...

YAAAAHHHHHH..

ATTRACTED BY THE CHILD'S AGONIZED SCREAMS, A PASSERBY WRENCHED THE HATE-CRAZED GIRL FROM HER VICTIM...

YOU VICIOUS LITTLE FIEND..

BUT WHEN THE MAN SAW OLGA'S FACE, HE STAGGERED BACK WITH A SHUDDER..

GOOD LORD!

OLGA RAN HOME, THEN, AND WITH HER FACE FLUSHED WITH EXCITEMENT, SHE RECOUNTED HER VILE DEEDS TO HER SHOCKED FATHER...

MY GOD, OLGA! DIDN'T YOUR MOTHER TEACH YOU RIGHT FROM WRONG?

IT'S GOOD TO HURT PEOPLE! IT'S GOOD TO MAKE THEM SCREAM! I FORGET WHAT I LOOK LIKE...

GET OUT OF MY SIGHT, YOU UGLY TWISTED MONSTER. GO TO YOUR ROOM!

I HOPE YOU DIE AND THEY PUT YOU UNDER DIRT IN A BOX! THEN PENNY AND I WILL BE HAPPY TOGETHER. WE'LL HAVE THIS HOUSE FOR OURSELVES...

BUT WHEN OLGA WAS IN BED THAT NIGHT, SHE WEPT BITTER TEARS OF SELF PITY...

IF I WAS PRETTY LIKE YOU, PENNY, THEN EVERYONE WOULDN'T HATE ME...SOB...DADDY WOULDN'T HATE ME...SOB..AND I ...SOB... WOULDN'T DO MEAN THINGS...

AND PENELOPE...BEAUTIFUL PENELOPE...REPLIED GENTLY...

YOU'RE NOT UGLY TO ME, OLGA... AND I COULD NEVER HATE YOU! YOU'RE MY OWN FLESH AND BLOOD! I LOVE YOU!

DOWNSTAIRS, JEFF WALLOWED IN HIS OWN SELF-PITY...
AS LONG AS OLGA IS ALIVE, PENNY AND I WILL ALWAYS BE TORTURED. SHE'S EVIL... THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT THE LITTLE MONSTER WILL DO NEXT...
HE TOOK THE REVOLVER FROM THE DRAWER...
AMY GUARDED THE SECRET OF THE TWINS WELL! AND THE MIDWIFE IS LONG DEAD. SO NO ONE KNOWS OF OLGA SAVE PENNY AND ME! PENNY...MY ONLY DAUGHTER...I'LL DO IT FOR HER...
THE LOCKED DOOR TO HIS DAUGHTERS' ROOM SHATTERED UNDER JEFF'S ASSAULT. HE STOOD THERE STARING AT OLGA'S HIDEOUS REVOLTING SURPRISED FACE...
DADDY! YOU... YOU'VE GOT A GUN!
I'M GOING TO KILL YOU, OLGA...
HE RAISED THE GUN... AND HE HEARD PENNY SCREAM FROM THE DARKNESS BEYOND HIS MONSTER-CHILD...
DON'T, DADDY! DON'T!
I'VE GOT TO, PENNY... FOR YOU...AND ME...
THE SHOTS ECHOED INTO THE NIGHT. OLGA'S CONTORTED FEATURES FROZE...SHE PITCHED FORWARD...DEAD...
NOW WE'RE FREE, PENNY! NOW WE'RE...CHOKE...
THE WORDS GURGLED IN JEFF LORIMER'S THROAT AS HE LOOKED DOWN AT HIS "ONLY" DAUGHTER'S...PENNY'S...BEAUTIFUL, PEACEFUL, DEAD FACE WITH THE HIDEOUS COUNTENANCE OF THE CREATURE HE'D KNOWN AS OLGA GROWING OUT OF THE BACK OF HER HEAD...
GOOD LORD!
SO WHAT'S SO BAD?! MOST WOMEN ARE TWO-FACED! AS FOR PENNY AND OLGA... WELL... THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHETHER THEY WERE COMING OR GOING. HEE, HEE! THAT'S MY ENTREE PORTION OF THIS MORBID MENU, CREEPS. THE VAULT-KEEPER AWAITS WITH HIS FOUL FARE. I'LL SEE YOU LATER WITH A GRIM FAIRY TALE. IN THE MEANTIME, PLEASANT SCREAMS. 'BYE FOR NOW.
THE ENO

THE VAULT OF HORROR!

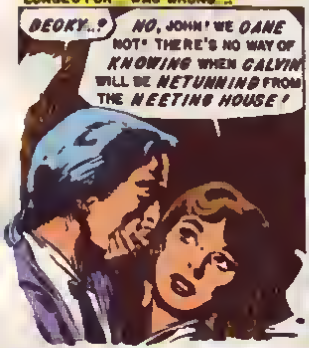
WELL, *OUCH* INTO THE *MUCK* OF *THE VAULT OF HORROR*, HIDIOTS AND... *OOPS!* ALMOST FORGOT MY *"HEH, HEH"!* SO, NEH, HEH... THIS IS YOUN *VAULT-KEEPER*, FULL OF *FLEAS*, WITH A *CHILLER-OILLER* FON *ITCH* AND EVERY *ONE* OF YOU. COME IN AND PLOP DOWN ON THAT *WATER-LOGGED CHAIR* THERE AND I'LL RECITE A *REVOLTING OPUS* OF *OLD NEW ENGLAND*... AN *EERIE EPISODE* OF *EARLY MASSACHUSETTS MAYHEM* ENTITLED...

GAME WASHED OUT!

JOHN TALBOT WAS UNLIKE THE OTHERS OF HIS COLONY. THEY WERE A BLEAK, COLD LOT... HIS PURITAN NEIGHBORS... STERN AND HARD LIKE THE DISMAL NEW ENGLAND COUNTRYSIDE SURROUNDING THEIR LITTLE SETTLEMENT. YET WHAT MAN OF THAT COLONY WOULD NOT HAVE GIVEN A YEAR OF HIS LIFE OR HIS OWN RIGHT ARM TO BE HOLDING BECKY AMES CLOSE THAT NIGHT, AS JOHN WAS DOING, IN THE LIGHT FROM THE WARM GLOW OF THE HEARTH FIRE... IN THAT SNUG LITTLE CABIN... THAT CABIN BELONGING TO CALVIN AMES, BECKY'S HUSBAND...

YES, BECKY WAS DIFFERENT, TOO. SHE'D DEFIED STRICT LAWS TO FLIRT WITH JOHN, TO LURE HIM ON TILL HIS WHOLE BEING ACHED FOR HER. BUT NOT UNTIL THAT NIGHT HAD HIS CHANCE COME...

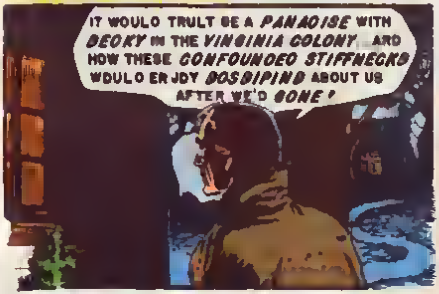
BEGEY EINDLED FLAWES OF PASSION IR JOHR, OEFYING THE HARSH PURISHMENT SHE COULD RECEIVE FOR "COQUETRY". WHAT THEY WERE DOING AT THAT MOWENT... WHAT JOHN SO EAGERLY LONGED FOR... WAS WRONG...



WHEN THEY HEARD THE SLOSHING OF BOOTED FEET IR THE MUD OF THE SPRING THAW, BECKY PALED AND LOOKED FRANTICALLT TOWARD THE FRONT DOOR. JOHN RETREATED TO THE BAOK WINDOW AND SLID IT OPEN.

HARDLY HAD JOHN SHUT THE WINDOW FROM THE OUTSIDE THAN CALVIR AMES ENTERED THE CABIN. HAD IT BEEN DAYTIME, CALVIN WOULD HAVE EASILY SEEN JOHN, BUT IN THE DARK, JOHN COULD SAFELY WATCH WHAT ENSUED... WATCH BECKY NERVOUSLY PUTTER WITH THE FIRE...

THE AMES' HOUSE WAS BUT A HUNDRED YARDS FROM JOHN'S OWN CABIN, AND HE DID NOT NOTICE THAT HIS WIFE, PRISCILLA, WAS WATCHING FROM A WINDOW SHE'D BEEN EVERYTHING..



PRISCILLA WAS LIKE THE REST... SO PROPER... SO COLD... THOUGH IR PRIVATE, HER TEMPER COULD FLARE. JOHN FELT HER ANGER WHEN HE OBSERVED THE SEARCHING LOOK SHE GAVE HIM AS HE ENTERED THE CABIN AND REMOVED HIS CLOAK...

JOHN TURRED TO THE FIRE TO AVOID HIS WIFE'S ACCUSING EYES, YET HE STILL FELT THEM ON HIS BACK... BURNING. HE TRIED TO BE CALM, STIRRING THE SMOULDERING ASHES WITH A POKER...

PRISCILLA'S IMPLICATION AROUSED JOHN'S ANGER. HE SPUN AROUND, FACING HER .. HOLDING THE POKER MENACINGLY... PRISCILLA NEVER FLINCHED...

YOU'D...YOU'D *TELL* THE *COUNCIL* ABOUT *BECKY AMES* AND *ME*!?

YES, JOHN .. IF I *EVER SEE YOU NEAR HER AGAIN!*

OH, JOHN...

SHE CAME TO JOHN, SLIPPING HER ARMS AROUND HIS NECK, CLINGING, PLEADING. HE TURNED ASIDE ANGRILY... HIS FACE TWISTED IN DISGUST...

IT'S *NO USE*, PRISCILLA! I *LOVE* BECKY! I'M GOING TO TAKE HER *AWAY* WITH ME!

NO, JOHN! NO! I WON'T LET YOU GO! I'LL *NEVER* LET YOU GO...

A WORD FROM PRISCILLA TO THE PURITAN COUNCIL WAS ALL THAT WOULD BE NEEDED FOR BECKY AND JOHN TO BE BURNED AT THE STAKE... OR AT BEST.. HANGED. JOHN KNEW THIS... AND FLEW INTO A VIOLENT RAGE... HE PUSHED HIS WIFE FROM HIM AND STRUCK OUT SAVAGELY.. WITH THE POKER...

YOU'LL LET ME GO... AND YOU *WON'T TELL*... UHHHH... *EITHER!*

I'LL *NEVER LET YOU GO, JOHN*... *GNNNNGGGHH*...

AGAIN AND AGAIN, JOHN BROUGHT THE POKER DOWN FURIOUSLY UPON HIS WIFE'S BLOODY HEAD UNTIL SHE LAY, NOT MOVING, ON THE DAIRY FLOOR FOR A LONG WHILE HE STOOD OVER HER BREATHING HARD. THEN THE HORROR OF WHAT HE'D DONE TOOK HOLD OF HIM AND HIS ONLY THOUGHT WAS OF DISPOSING OF HER BODY. HE PUT ON HIS CLOAK AND HAT, FOUND A COIL OF ROPE, AND LIFTED THE BLOODY CORPSE IN HIS ARMS

HE SLIPPED FROM THE REAR DOOR OF THE HOUSE AND INTO THE WOODS.

I'LL TAKE HER TO THE POND. IT'S DEEP... AND THEY'LL NEVER FIND HER THERE..

HE CURSED AT THE BRAMBLES THAT TORE AT HIS CLOTHES AS HE MADE HIS WAY, AND AT THE BLACKNESS OF THE NIGHT. AT LAST, HE REACHED THE ROCKY LEDGE THAT HUNG OVER THE DEEPEST PART OF THE POND...

HE USED THE WHOLE COIL OF ROPE TO BIND UP HIS WIFE'S BODY. THEN, HE ROLLED PRISCILLA OFF THE LEDGE...

...AND WATCHED HER DISAPPEAR INTO THE MURKY DEPTHS BELOW

BUT AS HE WAS ABOUT TO LEAVE, HE WAS DISMAYED TO SEE HIS WIFE'S CORPSE RISE SLOWLY BACK TO THE SURFACE.

STAY *DOWN*, WOMAN! YE GADS, CAN'T YOU DO THAT *ONE LAST TNING* FOR ME?!

TRY AS HE WOULD, JOHN WAS UNABLE TO KEEP PRISCILLA'S BODY DOWN. AT LAST HE FISHED HER OUT, FOUND A GDOD-SIZED BDULDER, AND ROLLED IT ONTO THE ROPE EXCEPT FROM HER WRISTS, LOOPED IT AROUND HER ANKLES, AND SECURED IT TO THE BOULDER.

THEN, HE PUSHED THE BDULDER INTO THE POND..AND IT DRAGGED PRISCILLA DOWN AFTER IT...

ONLY SOME SUBSLES AROSE TO THE SURFACE. PRISCILLA STAYED DOWN.

EARLY THE NEXT MDRNING, JDHN JOINED PERCY BLAIR ON A TURKEY HUNT. IN THE LATE AFTERNOON, AS THEY RETURNED TO THE SETTLEMENT WITH A NUMBER OF PLUMP BIRDS, THEY NDTICED A GROUP OF THE COLONISTS HUDDLED OUTSIDE JDHN'S CABIN.

WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE IS *WRONG*, JOHN?

I DON'T *KNOW*, PERCY! I CAN'T *IMAGINE!*

BECKY AMES AND HER HUSBAND WERE AMDNG THDSE WHO GREETED JOHN SD SDLEMNLY AS HE APPROACHED, . .

...AND I WAS *WDRRIED* LEST SHE BE *SICK* IN IN THERE, JOHN... SO I WENT IN... PRISCILLA WAS *NDWNERE ABDUT!* WE HAVEN'T *SEEN* HER *ALL DAY!*

BUT THAT'S *ABSURD!* I LEFT HER THIS *MDRNING* AND SHE WAS *PLEASED* THAT I PROMISED TD SAG HER SDME *TURKEYS*...

JDHN PUT ON A SPLENDID SHDW DF CDNCERN, RUSHING INTO THE HDUSE, THEN DUT AGAIN, WEARING THE GRAVEST EXPRESSIDN HE CDULD FDRCE UPDN HIS FACE. .

SHE *IS* GONE!

WE'LL HELP YOU *HUNT* FDR HER, JDHN. *EVERY MAN IN THE CDLDNY!*

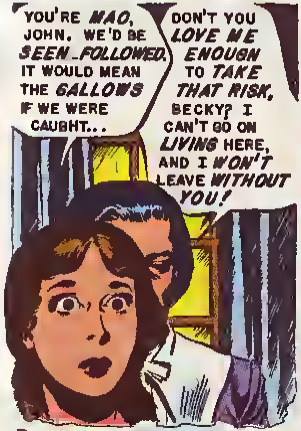
THEY BEAT THRDUGH THE SURRDUNDING WDDDS CALLING PRICILLA'S HAME. JDHN TREMBLED AS THEY WANDERED TDWARD THE PDND, BUT HE WAS IMMENSELY RELIEVED TD SEE THAT PRISCILLA'S BDDY HAD STAYED DDWN.., AND TD HEAR PERCY BLAIR'S KNDWING CDMMENT...

SHE *CAN'T* HAVE *DRDWNED* IN THERE! *BDDIES FLDAT*, YDU KNDW...

THAT'S *RIGHT!* *CDME!* LET US LDDK *FURTHER*...

THE SEARCH WAS FINALLY ABANDONED AT NIGHTFALL, AHD LATER, HEIGHBORS CAME TO REASSURE JOHN, THOUGH THERE WAS ALMOST AH UNSPOKEN UNDERSTANDING ANONG THEM THAT PRISCILLA WOULD NEVER RETURN. THE AMES WERE THERE, TOO, AHD JOHN OBSERVED THAT BECKY'S LIPS CURLED IN A SMALL SMILE . . .

JOHN DARED NOT BE SEEN WITH BECKY AMES, BUT HIS PLANS WERE MADE AND THEY INCLUDED HER. ONE DAY, HE COULD STAND IT NO LONGER. HE BUNDLED HIS BELONGINGS AND SLIPPED, UNOBSERVED, INTO THE AMES' CABIN. . .



BECKY HESITATED. JOHN TOOK HER IN HIS ARMS, ATTEMPTING TO MAKE UP HER MIND WITH THE TOUCH OF HIS LIPS ON HER. . .

THEN SUDDENLY SHE BROKE FROM HIS EMBRACE, HER FACE FLUSHED AND ANGRY. SHE SLAPPED HIM WITH ALL OF HER STREHGTH . . .

BECKY'D BEEN FACING THE DOOR! SHE'D SEEH IT OPEN. SHE'D BEEN HER HUSBAND STANDING THERE. SHE RAN TO HIM, SOBBING, BURYING HER FACE IN HIS CHEST. . .

HAD CALVIN COME ALONE, JOHN WOULD HAVE KILLED HIM AND CARRIED BECKY OFF, BUT THERE WERE OTHERS OUTSIDE AND A MOMENT LATER, THEY DRAGGED HIM FROM THE HOUSE. . .

CALVIN WAS BRAVE WHILE THE OTHERS PINNED JOHN'S ARMS. HE SWUNG OUT, CUTTING ACROSS JOHN'S MOUTH, SPLITTING HIS LIP OPEN. . .

A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL WAS CALLED AT ONCE, AND WHILE CALVIN AMES BLUSTERED OUT HIS COMPLAINT AMD SECKY STARED AT JOHN SRAZENLY, SEVEH GRIM COUM-CILMEM SAT SEHIHD THEIR LDNG TABLE, SOFFING UP HIS EVERY WORD EAGERLY. . .

I COULD ONLY STAND THERE... TOO STUNNED TO SPEAK. THIS... THIS SCOUNDREL WAS CRUSHING MY WIFE IN HIS ARMS, FORCING HIS LIPS AGAINST HERS.

YES, YES! AMD THEN...?

AHD HOW ASAPE AND STUPIFIED WITH FRUSTRA-TION AND DISAPPOINTMENT THEY WERE AT CALVIN'S INDIGNANT REPLY...

WHY, HE KISSED MY WIFE! I CAUGHT HIM OOING IT! ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?

JUST...

KISSED...

AFTER CONFERING IN WHISPERED HASTE WITH HIS COLLEAGUES, THE COUNCIL PRESIDENT AHNOUNCED..

JOHN TALBOT! WE PIMD YOU GUILTY OF ARTICLE ONE, SECTION FOUR OF OUR GODE... PUNISHASLE SY THREE DUCKINGS ON THE STOOL.

WHAT!? DUCKINGS!? HE OUGHT YO BE HORSE-WHIPPED TILL HIS FLESH HANGS FRDM HIS BONES...

JOHM WAS SOUND FAST AND LED TO THE DUCKING STOOL. HE SEARCHED FOR SECKY'S FACE AMDNG THE CROWD OF DHLDDKERS AS HE WAS PUSHED INTO THE CHAIR...

READY..

SHE WAS THERE AND HER EYES TOLD HIM THAT SHE WAS SORRY... THAT SHE DID LOVE HIM... THAT SHE'D ACTED WISELY UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. HE SMILED KNOWINGLY. THERE'D BE OTHER DAYS... AND BETTER OPPOR-TUHITIES...

RAISE...

THE CHAIR AT THE ERD DF THE LONG BEAM WAS SEE-SAWED HIGH OVER THE HEADS OF THE CROWD... HIGH OVER BEAUTIFUL OESIRASLE SECKY. JDHH LOOKED DOWN... DOWN AT THE RIPPLING SURFACE OF THE DUCKING POND...

RELEASE...

HE TOOK A DEEP BREATH. THEN... THE DUCKING POND! DH, LORD! HE'D FORGOTTEN! HE SCREAMED AS HE HIT THE WATER..

NO! NO! STOP! IN THE NAME OF HEAVEN! YOU'VE GOT TO ST-GGGLUGG...

HIS SCREAMS OF PROTEST HAD EXHAUSTED HIS AIR SUPPLY AND HE'D SONE DOWN WITH NO BREATH LEFT IN HIS LUNGS. EACH AGONIZED SECOND WAS AN HOUR. HIS HEAD POUNDED... HIS HEART THUMPED... HIS BRAIN REELED, AS THEY HELD HIM DOWN. AND *THEN...THEN HE SAW PRISCILLA, FLOATING LAZILY...*

HAD HE *REALLY* SEEN HER? OR WAS IT SOME *MAD NIGHTMARE!?* LIGHTS FLASHED. HE FELT HIMSELF SLIPPING INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS. AND THEN HE WAS BEING RAISED... HIGH...OUT OF THE WATER. HE SUCKED IN PRECIOUS AIR... THEN SHRIEKED...

AGAIN HE WAS PLUNGED DOWN INTO THE MURKY DEPTHS OF THE POOL. WHEN THE WATER STOPPED CHURNING AND THE BUBBLES RAN CRAZILY UPWARD TO THE SURFACE, HE COULD SEE PRISCILLA'S BODY, ITS WRISTS BOUND TIGHTLY, THE ROPE COILING DOWN AROUND ITS ANKLES, THEN OFF INTO THE DARK DEPTHS TO THE BOULDER. IT WAS CLOSER TO HIM NOW, TWISTING, TURNING, BOBBING..

AGAIN HE WAS VAULTED INTO THE AIR... AGAIN HE SCREAMED IN PROTEST...BUT HIS CROAKING PLEAS WERE ONLY DROWNED OUT BY THE HOOTING OF THE CROWD...

AND AGAIN HE WAS PLUNGED DOWN TO THE FLOATING, SWAYING, PULPY-FACED CORPSE THAT DRIFTED OVER [illegible] ARMS REACHING UPWARD...LOOPING OVER HIM...OVER HIS HEAD...

AND WHEN THE DUCKING STOOL WAS RAISED [illegible]

BELOW THE SURFACE OF THE POND, JOHN TALBOT WRITHED IN THE LOOP FORMED AROUND HIS NECK BY HIS DEAD WIFE'S ARMS AND BOUND WRISTS. AND IN THAT HORRIBLE MOMENT BEFORE THE WATER RUSHED INTO HIS TORTURED LUNGS, HER SOFT SLIMY FACE TOUCHED HIS AND HER SIGHTLESS EYES STARED AND HE COULD ALMOST HEAR HER GRINNING MOUTH WHISPER...

HEH, HEH! A *REAL CLINGING VINE*, THIS PRISCILLA, EH, KIDDIES? WELL, SHE SURE *HELD* HER MAN *FINALLY!* AS THE *FAIRY TALES* END...*THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER UNDER!* AND *TALKING* ABOUT *FAIRY TALES*, THE *OLD WITCH* IS WAITING WITH A *GRIM ONE*, SO I'LL TURN YOU *BACK* TO HER. DON'T FORGET TO BUY *"TALES FROM THE CRYPT"* ... NOW ON SALE...E.C.'S NEXT CREEPS COMIC. I'LL *CLOSE* WITH, AS THE *MEXICAN BIOLOGISTS* SAY, *"ADIOS AMEOBAS!"*

EASY DOUGH

This'd be a real cooky of a joh, Bootsy Dolin snickered as he turned the knoh of a door lettered FEDERAL BAKING CO., CASHIER'S OFFICE. There was a fat payroll here waiting to he gohhled up . . . this heist job'd he as easy as eating macaroons!

Bootsy stepped into the cashier's office: the room's only occupant was an elderly woman absorhed in working at a desk. He quickly crossed the room, then tapped the desk until the old woman looked up in surprise. Bootsy leered back at her, removed a revolver from his pocket and hefted it in his hand.

It went even easier than he'd anticipated. Except for a choked gasp of alarm, the old cashier followed Bootsy's script exactly. While he watched with disdain, she opened a hig floor safe and removed a tray piled high with handed hills. Bootsy filled his coat and pants pockets carefully, then waved the remaining banknotes aside. Backing out of the room, his gun still zeroed in on the tremhling old lady, he growled: "Gimme ten minutes, sister . . . then you can cackle as much as you like! Turn in an alarm hefore that . . ." his voice lowered to a sinister whisper . . . "and all the dough in the world won't he enough to pay your plastic surgery hill when I get finished putting your face through the grinder!"

Then he was gone, moving swiftly down the corridor toward the exit near his parked car. He hadn't gone more than ten yards when he heard the alarm clanging raucously. He gulped, turned into another corridor, tried to retrace his steps to the cashier's office . . . and realized that he had lost his way.

Whinnying with fear, he darted into a vast room filled with clouds of flour dust and the unmistakable odor of baking. He heard the sound of feet pounding down the corridor hehind him, and the muffled noise of shouting. *That stupid old dame,* he moaned, looking about desperately for a place to hide. Off to one side was a whole row of small doors, slightly above floor level. Probably storage cabinets, he thought, racing forward and flinging the nearest door wide. *I can duck outa sight in one of these cuhhyholes . . . until the heat dies down!* He chuckled as he squeezed into the tiny chamher and closed the door behind him. *I'm a smart cooky,* he gloated. *That's why I'm ahle to grab off this easy dough!*

In the darkness Bootsy was aware that he had stepped into a chamber rapidly filling with something soft and fluffy and yielding . . . had stepped into a wad of haking dough. Suddenly, a heavy plate hegan to descend from the ceiling, pressing down relentlessly on his head and shoulders. As he crouched in terror, attempting to scramble back to the door, Bootsy saw that the floor was perforated with curious holes. Some looked like stars, others resembled crescents and chlongs . . .

Bootsy screamed in agony, hut it was already too late. The heavy metal ceiling was grinding down upon him, squeezing him against the grated floor . . . smashing his flesh downward and pulverizing his hones . . . thrusting his hody murderously against the perforations.

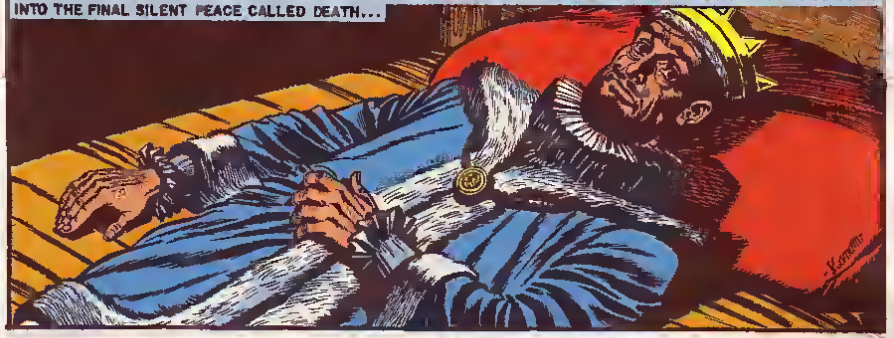
As his body was torn to shreds hy the awesome weight from above, Bootsy knew where he had sought refuge. He'd been trapped in a cooky press . . . hut *this* batch was destined to hecome a gory hlood pudding!

THE OLD WITCH'S GRIM FAIRY TALE!

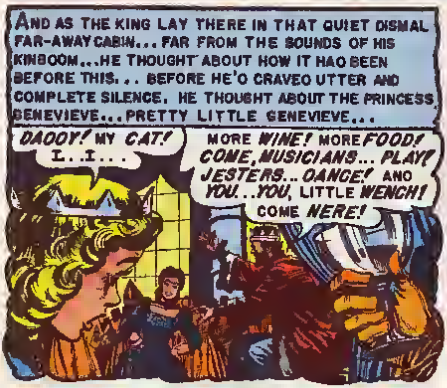
AND NOW FOR A *LONG-LOST DEPARTMENT* OF MY REEKING RESTAURANT, *THE HAUNT OF FEAR!* A *CHILDISH CHILLER!* A *NAUSEATING NURSERY NOVELETTE!* AN *INFANTILE INSANITY* CALLED:

The Silent Treatment

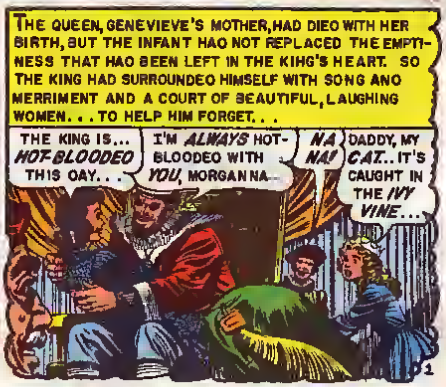
ONCE UPON A TIME, LONG, LONG AGO, HUDDLED ON A BED IN A CABIN HIGH IN THE MOUNTAINS, A KING LAY STIFFLY, RIGIDLY, NOT DARING TO MOVE, NOT DARING HARLY TO BREATHE, NOT DARING TO DO ANYTHING EXCEPT WAIT, AND LISTEN, AND KNOW THAT IF HE HEARD IT AGAIN... THAT IF IT STARTED AGAIN, THAT MADDENING SOUND... THAT HIS MIND WOULD SURELY SNAP AND HE'D RAVE AND RANT AND FINALLY FLING HIMSELF FROM THE CLIFF OUTSIDE DOWN INTO THE FINAL SILENT PEACE CALLED DEATH...



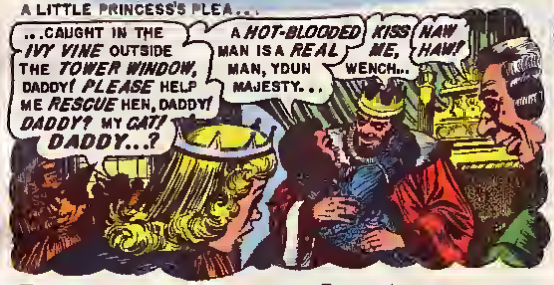
AND AS THE KING LAY THERE IN THAT QUIET DISMAL FAR-AWAY CABIN... FAR FROM THE SOUNDS OF HIS KINGDOM... HE THOUGHT ABOUT HOW IT HAD BEEN BEFORE THIS... BEFORE HE'D CRAVED UTTER AND COMPLETE SILENCE. HE THOUGHT ABOUT THE PRINCESS GENEVIEVE... PRETTY LITTLE GENEVIEVE...



THE QUEEN, GENEVIEVE'S MOTHER, HAD DIED WITH HER BIRTH, BUT THE INFANT HAD NOT REPLACED THE EMPTINESS THAT HAD BEEN LEFT IN THE KING'S HEART. SO THE KING HAD SURROUNDED HIMSELF WITH SONG AND MERRIMENT AND A COURT OF BEAUTIFUL, LAUGHING WOMEN... TO HELP HIM FORGET...



So orchestras had played and jesters had squealed and the ladies of the court had laughed and chattered and whispered coquettish things into the king's ear. And the palace had been filled with noise... the noise of gayiety and fun.. loud noise...drowning-out noise... drowning out a little princess's plea...



The din of self-indulgence had echoed through the palace as the princess genevieve had shrugged and turned at her father's indifference and climbed the long winding tower steps, the tears streaming from her eyes...

The little princess had mounted to the towen winddw, determined to rescue hen thapped pet henself. she'd neached dut cdaxing ldving arms as the melee df noise drifted up to her...

But she'd leaned dut too far. she'd slipped from the tower window, clawing, catching herself dn the ivy, clinging there precariously, high asove the din. and she'd screamed...

But the king had ndt heand his little daughten's cnies. her childish scheams had not been able to penethate the menniment and cavdrting ndise that reverbenated thnough the throne room...

And so, the princess genevieve had hung there, cnying fon help, until her tiny fingers had weakened and grown tired and ldst their hold dn the twisting vines... and she'd plunoed downward,..shnieking...

Then, suddenly, a stnange silence had fallen updn the castle as the echoes of a plunging dying shriek had faded away. the king had stood up...his mouth quivering...his eyes wide...

THE KING HAD NOT HEARD HIS DAUGHTER'S PLEA... HER CRIES FOR HELP. THE KING HAD BEEN SURROUNDED WITH EAR-SPLITTING NOISE. AND NOW, THE NOISE... AND HIS DAUGHTER... HAD BOTH DIED AWAY...

GENEVIEVE...SOB! GENEVIEVE...

AFTER THE PRINCESS'S DEATH, THE KING HAD ORDERED THE ORCHESTRAS DISBANDED...THE JESTERS STILLED... THE LAUGHING LADIES OF THE COURT AWAY. THE KING HAD WANTED SILENCE, NOW... A SILENCE OF MOURNING...

YOUR MAJESTY! I...

SH-H-H-...

AND SO, MONTHS HAD PASSED. THE MOURNING PERIOD HAD ENDED FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE KINGDOM. ONCE MORE, CHURCH BELLS HAD TOLLED AND OXCARTS HAD RUMBLED AND THE PEOPLE HAD GONE ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS. BUT FOR THE KING, THE MOURNING PERIOD HAD NOT ENDED. IT WOULD NEVER END. EACH SOUND THAT REACHED THE KING'S EARS BROUGHT WITH IT THE ECHO OF A GIRL'S SHRIEK OF DEATH...

STOP IT! STOP THAT CLATTER!

YES, YOUR MAJESTY!

THE CONSCIENCE-STRICKEN KING HAD GROWN MORE AND MORE SENSITIVE TO NOISE AS TIME HAD GONE BY. A DREADFUL SILENCE HAD COME UPON THE PALACE. THE SERVANTS, WARY OF INCURRING THE KING'S WRATH, HAD BEEN FORCED TO MOVE ABOUT THE MARBLE HALLS IN THEIR STOCKING FEET. A NERVOUS CARE WAS TAKEN TO SEE THAT NO UNNECESSARY SOUND WAS MADE, OR ELSE...

OOPS!

BLAST YOU! CLUMSY! I WANT IT QUIET!

BUT EVEN WITH THE DEAD STILLNESS SURROUNDING HIM IN THE PALACE, THE KING HAD NOT BEEN SATISFIED. IN THE TOWN FAR BELOW, THE TOLLING OF THE CHURCH BELL HAD GRATED UPON HIS ACUTELY SENSITIVE EARS...

IT'S A *WEDDING*, YOUR MAJESTY! THE PEOPLE ARE *REJOICING*!

ORDER THE BELL SILENCED! HAVE IT REMOVED AND MELTED DOWN! I CAN'T STAND THE NOISE!

THE PEOPLE OF THE KINGDOM WERE NOT HAPPY THAT THEIR GLORIOUS BELL COULD NO LONGER RING OUT. BUT WHAT COULD THEY DO? THE KING HAD ORDERED SILENCE... AND THE KING WAS THE KING!...

WHAT *IS* THAT? WHAT'S THAT *HAMMERING* AND *CLANGING* DOWN THERE?

IT IS THE *BLACKSMITH*, SIRE. HE IS *TEMPERING* THE *HORSESHOES*..

ORDER HIM TO STOP! ORDER HIM TO STOP IMMEDIATELY!

THEN THE KING CALLED HIS ROYAL PRIME MINISTER...

ISSUE AN ORDER! THERE WILL BE *NO NOISE!* I WANT *SILENCE*, DO YOU HEAR? *SILENCE!* ANYONE WHO DARES *DEFY* ME WILL BE *THROWN IN IRONS!*

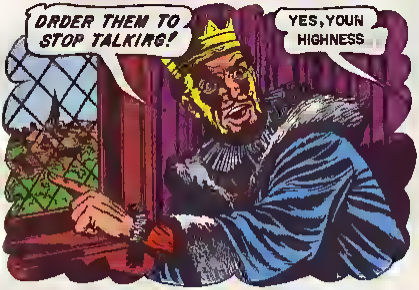
YES, YOUR MAJESTY!

THE BLACKSMITH HAD BEEN ORDERED TO STOP HIS ANVIL HAMMERING THEREBY FORCING HIM TO CLOSE DOWN. BUT, HE'D BEEN ARRESTED WHEN HE'D TACKED UP HIS NOTICE...

MERCHANTS HAD BEEN FORCED TO ABANDON THEIR OXCARTS AS A MEANS OF CARRYING ABOUT THEIR MERCHANDISE BECAUSE OF THE RACKET THE WOODEN WHEELS MADE ON THE COBBLESTONES...

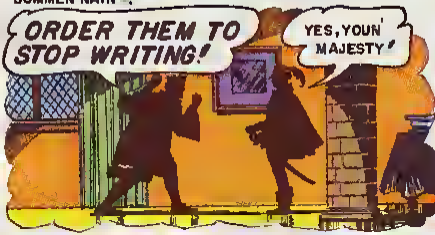
CARPENTERS WERE FORCED TO GIVE UP THE TRADE BECAUSE THEIR SAWING AND NAILING IRRITATED THEIR KING. BUILDING WAS HALTED...

FINALLY, THE SOUND-SENSITIVE KING HAD LOOKED OUT OVER HIS SILENT KINGDOM FROM HIS SILENT PALACE AND NODDED IN RELIEVED APPROVAL. NOW ALL WAS QUIET. NOW ALL WAS STILL. AND THEN HE'D HEARD THE BABBLE .LIKE MICE IN WALLS.THE CHATTERING...THE DISTANT SOUNDS OF VOICES...

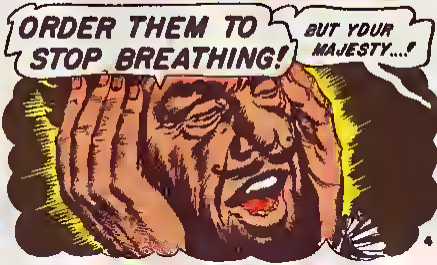


TALKING WAS OUTLAWED. THE PEOPLE HAD TAKEN TO WHISPERING. ANYONE WHO'D ACCIDENTLY TALKED IN A NORMAL VOICE WAS IMMEDIATELY CARTED OFF AND HIS TONGUE CUT OUT. THE KING'D LOOKED OUT OVER HIS SILENT KINGDOM FROM HIS SILENT PALACE AND HE'D NODDED. AND THEN HE'D HEARD THE HISSING.. THE SIBILANT MURMURS...LIKE WIND-BLOWN LEAVES...

AND SO, ALL WHISPERING HAD BEEN BANISHED FROM THE KINGDOM. THE PEOPLE HAD TAKEN TO WRITING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THEMSELVES. EVERYONE CARRIED IMPLEMENTS WITH THEM, AND THE KING'D LOOKED OUT AND HE'D HEARD THE SCRATCHING AND SCRAPING...THE RUBBING OF CHALK ON SLATE .. LIKE SUMMER RAIN ..



NOW THE PEOPLE OF THE KINGDOM COULD DO NOTHING BUT SIT AND STARE AT EACH OTHER. AND THE KING'D LOOKED OUT OVER HIS SILENT KINGDOM, AND HE'D HEARD THE FAINT SIGHS THE SUCKING IN AND EXPELLING OUT OF AIR FROM THEIR LUNGS .LIKE SPRING BREEZES ..



THE KING HAD RAVED AND RANTED... INSISTING UPON THE ORDER...

BUT, YOUR MAJESTY! IF THE PEOPLE CANNOT BREATHE, THEY WILL DIE!

THEN LET THEM DIE! I WANT SILENCE!

...AND OVER THE SILENT SILENT KINGDOM, HIS VOICE HAD CARRIED LIKE AN ECHO...

DID YOU HEAR?

THE FOOL HAS GONE FAR ENOUGH!

THE PRIME-MINISTER HAD SHUFFLED OFF ON PADDED FEET AND THE KING HAD STOOD IN THE SILENCE AND LISTENED, WAITING FOR THE SOUNDS OF THE BREATHING THAT DRIFTED UP TO HIM FROM THE KINGDOM BELOW TO STOP. BUT INSTEAD, HE'D HEARD A STIRRING...

THEY'RE TALKING! THEY'RE WHISPERING AGAIN!

AND THE STIRRING HAD BECOME A MURMUR ...AND THE MURMUR A HUMMING .. AND THE HUMMING A ROAR ... AND THE ROAR HAD THUNDERED UP THE MOUNTAIN TOWARD THE PALACE...

SILENCE! SILENCE, YOU FOOLS! GO BACK! GO BACK AND KEEP QUIET!

THE THUNDER HAD BEEN SO LOUD, IT DROWNED OUT THE SHRIEKS OF THE KING. THE THUNDER HAD BEEN A THOUSAND ANGRY VOICES... A THOUSAND PAIRS OF ANGRY FEET... THE CARPENTERS... THE BLACKSMITHS... THE MERCHANTS... AND LEADING THEM, A CRAFTSMAN NAMED MASON HIGGINS. MASON HIGGINS HAD CLUTCHED A SMALL BOX IN HIS HAND.

SWIM THE MOAT!

LOWER THE DRAWBRIDGE!

THE THUNDERING PEOPLE HAD STORMED THE PALACE AND OVERPOWERED THE GUARDS AND STAMPEDED THROUGH THE MARBLE HALLS AND FOUND THE KING...

HERE HE IS!

GET HIM!

HIGGINS! THE BOX!...

OH, LORD! THE NOISE!

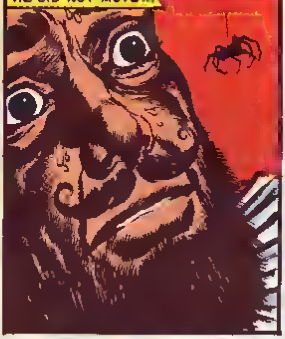
THE KING HAD BEEN FORCED TO THE FLOOR AND THE PEOPLE HAD DONE THINGS TO HIM ...WITH KNIVES AND NEEDLES AND THREADS AND MASON HIGGINS'S LITTLE BOX...

So, once upon a time, a king lay stiffly, rigidly, on a bed in a cabin high in the mountains where his people had exiled him. He lay, not daring to move...not daring to breathe... not daring to do anything but wait, and listen, and know that if he'd hear that sound again...just once...he'd go out of his mind...

It wouldn't happen as long as he lay still. It wouldn't happen as long as he wouldn't move. The king knew that. He'd suffered hours of torture time and time again during his brief exile. He'd born up under the maddening sound until it'd stopped...and he'd found out! He'd found out that if he moved, it would start again...

So he lay stiffly...like stone... like silent stone...and he watched the spider...the silent spider on the ceiling... spinning its silent web...

And he watched the web lengthen and the spider drop, inch by inch, lower and lower, until it hung just above his face. And still he did not move...



He just prayed. He prayed that the spider in the silent, silent cabin would silently climb *back up* its silent silken thread, instead of...instead of...*oh, Lord!* the spider was coming *closer... closer*...closer to the king's *face*...

And then it *touched* him and he *shuddered* and *screamed* and *swung* at the spider and the *silence was destroyed*. That *sound!* That *maddening sound began again!* That incessant maddening *tick-tock...tick-tock...tick-tock*...the sound that was *driving him out of his mind*...

...the sound coming from the *special metronome time-piece* Mason Higgins had labored over, ever so quietly, after they'd made him close his shop and stop his clocks...the metronome time-piece that *wound up automatically* at the *slightest slightest movement* and took *hours* to *run down*...

The metronome time-piece they'd *sewn inside the king* before they'd gone back to their normal noisy routines, living *happily ever after*...while the *king* went *off the deep end*...*off the cliff!*

THE-END

THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEH, HEH! AND NOW THAT THOSE *OTHER* TWO *GHOULUNATICS* HAVE *CUROLED* YOUR *BLOOD*, IT'S TIME FOR *ME* TO *CHURN IT* WITH ANOTHER *LOATHSOME LURID LITERARY PIECE* FROM *THE CRYPT OF TERROR*. YEP, IT'S YOUR *CHAIRMAN* OF *CHEERFUL CHILLS*... YOUR *CRYPT-KEEPER*... READY TO READ ANOTHER *REVOLTING RIOT*. *THIS* TENSE *TERROR-TALE* IS TOLD BY AN *OLD SHACK*. IT'S SORT OF A *HOUSE OICK*-TATION. SO *HERE GOES WITH:*

SWAMPED

TO ANY STRANGER *FOOLHARDY* AND *CARELESS* ENOUGH TO *WANDER* THIS DEEP INTO THE FOREBODING AND TREACHEROUS *OKEFENOKEE SWAMP*, I WOULD APPEAR AS *NOTHING MORE* THAN A *WEATHERBEATEN ROTTING OLD ABANDONED SHACK*, STANDING ANGULAR AND LONELY IN THE DANK DIM DAYLIGHT BENEATH MOSS-HUNG CYPRESS TREES IN THE CENTER OF THIS SHIMMERING MUD-CLEARING...

BUT I AM *FAR FROM THAT!* FOR WITHIN MY WORM-INFESTED WALLS...WHERE SPIDERS SPIN THEIR SILKEN WEBS AND WAIT FOR UNSUSPECTING VICTIMS TO TRAP THEMSELVES...WHERE RATS AND CRAWLING THINGS SCURRY OVER MILDEWED CRACKING FLOORBOARDS... I NESTLE A *HORRENDOUS CREATURE* TO MY PINE BOSOM...

...A CREATURE IN HUMAN FORM, AND YET OF SUCH *NOESCRIBABLE REVULSION* AND *LOATHSOMENESS* THAT EVEN THE *FLIES* AVOID HIM AND THE EVER-THIRSTY *SWAMP MOSQUITOES* REFUSE TO LIGHT UPON HIS SICKENING FLESH AND SUCK UPON HIS CONTAMINATED BLOOD...

...A *MAN-THING* WHO SITS BY DAY IN A STUPOR RESEMBLING DEATH.. WHO SITS AND STARES AND OCCASIONALLY MUMBLES AND LAUGHS MANIACALLY AND LICKS HIS FESTERING LIPS..

...A *HERMIT* WHO, WHEN DUSK COMES UPON THE OKEFENOKEE ...WHEN THE COTTONMOUTH CURLS IN ITS STAGNANT POOL AND THE ALLIGATOR INCHES UP ONTO ITS SLIMY BANK AND THE SWAMP BIRDS FALL INTO HISSING SILENCE, *RISES* FROM HIS STUPOR WITH A *CRAVING*, A *HUNGER*..

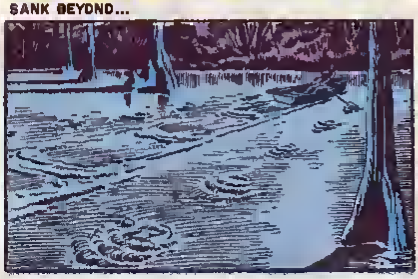
...CROSSES MY ALGAE-GREENED FLOOR PLANKS WITH DRAGGING FEET, HEAVY WITH *WEAKNESS* AND *SAPPED STRENGTH*..

... AND STEPS OUT INTO THE THICK, HOT, WET SWAMP NIGHT, YEARNING.. TORTURED ...PRAYING THAT *THIS* TIME, *THIS TIME* HIS *HUNGER WILL BE SATED*.

MY CRUDE PORCH WINES UNDER HIS WEIGHT AS HE SHUFFLES TO THE LADDER... EASES DOWN...

...DOWN TO THE FLAT-BOTTOMED BOAT LASHED TO ONE OF MY MOSSY-SLICK SUPPORTING STILTS... TO THE *BOAT RESTING ON THE GLIMMERING MUD*...

THEN, *IDIOTICALLY* AS IT MAY *APPEAR*, MY HERMIT-CHARGE.. MY HORRENDOUS SECRET.. BEGINS TO *ROW*. HE *ROWS ACROSS THE SHIMMERING MUD CLEARING*, PUSHING BACK GREAT GOBS OF GLITTERING WET SAND, SKIMMING HIS BOAT TOWARD THE GRASSY BANK BEYOND...



CAREFULLY HE TIES THE BOAT TO AN OVERHANGING LIMB AND CLIMBS ONTO THE DRY MOUND. HE TURNS ONCE TO *GRIN* AT ME AS I STAND *LONELY* AND *POLLUTED* AND *ASHAMED*, THEN DUCKS OFF INTO THE DARK MYSTERIOUS OKEFENOKEE SWAMP...

THIS IS THE WAY IT *IS* EACH NIGHT. THIS IS THE WAY IT *HAS BEEN* EVER SINCE I CAME INTO *BEING* ...EVER SINCE THAT DAY, AN ETERNITY AGO, WHEN MY HERMIT-CHARGE DRAGGED HIS BOAT TO THIS OPEN SPOT IN THE SWAMP AND ROWED OUT AND LABORIOUSLY DROVE LONG POLES DEEP DOWN INTO THE MUD...

HE *WAS THEN* AS HE *IS NOW*... FOUL-SMELLING AND HIDEOUS ...AND YET, AS I TOOK SHAPE UPON MY STILT-LEGS, I *DID NOT HATE HIM*. HE WAS MY *CREATOR* AND MY *MASTER*. HE HAD *FORMED* ME OUT OF *LOGS* AND *PLANKS* AND *RUSTY NAILS* AND *CAST-OFF STOVE PIPINGS* AND A *THOUSAND OTHER SALVAGED ITEMS*. HE WAS MY *MAKER* AND MY *FATHER* AND I *LOVED* HIM FOR BREATHING *LIFE* INTO ME...

WHEN I WAS DONE, HE'D SAT *INSIDE* ME AND I'D *NESTLED* HIM AND I'D FELT *HAPPY* AND *COMPLETE*...

THEN HE'D CUT THE *TRAP DOOR* IN MY FLOOR BOARDS AND FASTENED IT WITH RUSTED HINGES AND HE'D GRINNED DOWN AT THE SHIMMERING MUD BELOW ME AND I'D FELT A *TREMOR* RUN THROUGH ME...

AND THEN IT'D *BEGUN* THOSE *HIGHTLY SOJOURNS* INTO THE MYSTENIOUS SWAMP BEYOND MY CLEARING-WORLD...

ONE NIGHT HE'D COME BACK *DRAGGING* SOMETHING .. SOMETHING *BULKY* AND *SOFT* AND *LIMP*. HE'D DUMPED IT INTO HIS FLAT-BOAT AND SKIMMED TO ME, AND I'D HEARD HIS MANIACAL LAUGH FOR THE *FIRST TIME* AND SEEN HIM *DROOLING SPITTLE* AND SHAKING WITH *EAGER ANTICIPATION*...

HE'D BROUGHT BACK A *BODY*... A BODY OF A *HUNTER* WHO'D BEEN CAMPING NEARBY. I'D FELT SUDDENLY *COLD* AS HE'D CARRIED IT INSIDE ME AND DROPPED IT UPON MY FLOOR AND SAVAGELY RIPPED ITS CLOTHES AWAY. AND THEN I'D *REALIZED*...I'D REALIZED IN *REVULSION* AND *DREAD* AS HE'D BEGUN TO *FEAST* UPON THE DEAD FLESH...

...THAT MY *MAKER*...MY *MASTER*...MY *HERMIT-CHARGE* WAS A *GHOUL*...

MY BEAMS'D GROANED AND MY STUDS'D CREAKED AND I'D SETTLED AN INCH OR TWO INTO THE MUD BELOW ME AS I'D *WITNESSED* THE DISGUSTING SCENE.. SAW HIM *SLASH* AND *SNARL* AND *MUNCH* LIKE AN IDIOT-CHILD . *STRIPPING* THE BONES CLEAN... *DEVOURING* THE COLD RAW FLESH...

AND THEN I'D HEARD THE *VOICE*.. AN *ANGRY* VOICE... SHOUTING LOUDLY... AND *ANOTHER* HUNTER'S APPEARED ON THE GRASSY MOUND AT THE EDGE OF THE MUD-FLAT CLEARING...

ALL RIGHT, YOU! I KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE! C'MON OUT OR I'LL COME IN AND GET YOU...

MY HIDEOUS CREATOR'D STIFFENED SUDDENLY...LOOKED AROUND WILDLY... THEN RELAXED AS THOUGH HE'D FORGOTTEN FOR A MOMENT, THEN REMEMBERED HOW I'D GOT HERE... HE'D GONE TO THE DOOR...

WHAT'D YOU DO WITH EDDIE? WHERE IS HE? SO HELP ME, IF YOU'VE HARMED HIM...

AND HE'D *GRINNED* AS THE OTHER HUNTER'D STARTED TOWARD ME... STEPPING OUT INTO THE GLIMMERING MUD...

WHAT THE?!

...AND SINKING *DOWN*...*DOWN* INTO *THE SUCKING, WET, SWIRLING MIRE*...

OH, LORD...

...SLOWLY DOWN...DOWN INTO THE...

QUICKSAND!

YAAAAAAAAAAGGH...CH...CK...

I'D SHUDDERED AS THE SLIME HAD SWALLOWED HIM UP, RISING TO HIS CHEST, HIS NECK, HIS SHOULDERS, POURING INTO HIS MOUTH, CUTTING OFF HIS SCREAM IN A GRATING CHOKING COUGH, THEN CLOSING OVER HIM. HOW I *KNEW* WHY I'D BEEN BUILT OVER THIS QUICKSAND BOG. NOW I KNEW THE *REASON*. BUT THERE WAS *ANOTHER* REASON TOO... AS I *SOON LEARNED*...

HEH, HEH...

THE *GHOUL*...MY MAKER... MY CREATOR HAD TURNED IN GIBOLINS SATISFACTION AND HAD WADDLED BACK INSIDE ME.. BACK TO THE PARTIALLY DEVOURED CORPSE THAT LAY UPON MY FLOORBOARDS. AND WHEN HE'D *FINISHED*...WHEN HE'D *SATISFIED* HIS CRAVINGS... WHEN THE FLESH WAS *GONE* AND ALL THAT WAS LEFT WERE *BONES* AND QUIVERING *JHARDS*, HE'D *OPENED THE TRAP DOOR*.

...AND *HE'D SWEPT THE GORY REMAINS INTO THE HUNGRY WAITING BOG BELOW ME*...

I'D BEEN BORN OF *SCRAPS* AND *SALVAGE* AND *CAST-OFFS* BY A CREATURE THAT *SOCIETY* HAD CAST OFF. I WAS THE *HOME* OF A *GHOUL*..., A *SAFE* HOME... A *PRACTICAL* HOME... *PROTECTING* HIM FROM HARM BY A *SURROUNDING BOG OF QUICKSAND*... AND HELPING HIM TO *HIDE* HIMSELF OF THE *EVIDENCES* OF HIS FIENDISH WORK BY A *TRAP DOOR* IN MY *BASE-FLOORING*. I WAS HIS *SILENT COHORT*..., HIS *LIFELESS WOODEN COLLABORATOR*. AND I WAS *HELPLESS*. COULD I *STOP* HIS NIGHTLY PROWLING?...

COULD I *STOP* HIS FINDING A DANCING CAMPFIRE DEEP IN THE SWAMPS FAR FROM WHERE I STOOD?...

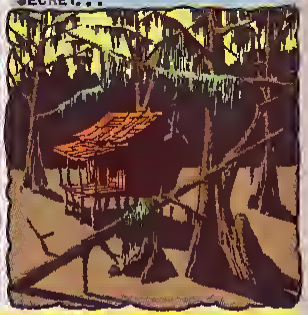
COULD I *STOP* HIS HUNGER-DRIVEN, FLESH-MADDENED ATTACKS?..

COULD I *STOP* HIM FROM BRINGING THE COLD AND WHITE AND STIFF CORPSES BACK TO ME...?

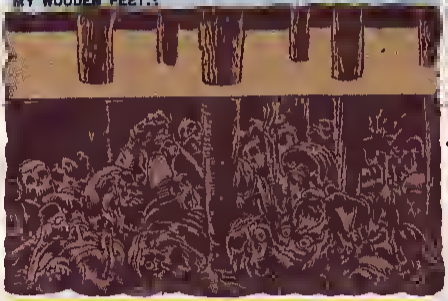
COULD I STOP THE IDIOTS THAT *PURSUED* HIM...RUNNING BLINDLY INTO THE WAITING HUNGRY QUICK-SAND?..

COULD I STOP HIM FROM *DUMP-ING* THE GRUESOME REMAINS OF HIS DISGUSTING INDULGENCES THROUGH THE TRAP-DOOR DOWN INTO THE EVIDENCE-SWALLOWING QUAGMIRE?...

NO! FOR I WAS NOTHING BUT *PLANKS* AND *LOGS* AND *RUSTED NAILS*...A *LIFELESS THING* THAT COULD ONLY *STAND* AND *WAIT* AND *SEE*. I COULD DO *NOTHING*. *NOTHING!* AND SO I'D STOOD BENEATH THE MOSS-HUNG CYPRESS TREES AND I'D NESTLED MY VILE SECRET...



WHILE BELOW ME, AROUND MY STILT LEGS, THE QUAG-MIRE *SHIMMERED* AND *EDDIED*. I FELT THE BODIES OF THE *DEAD* WHO STUMBLED *INTO* IT AND THE BONES OF THOSE WHO WERE *DUMPED* INTO IT BRUSH AGAINST MY WOODEN FEET..



I FELT A MILLION YEARS OF *DECOMPOSITION* AND *DECAY* CARESS MY LIFELESS LEGS.. THE *SAME* DECOM-POSITION AND DECAY THAT CARESSED THE LEGS OF THE ONCE-MIGHTY *DINOSAURS* EONS UPON EONS AGO..

THE *SAME* SLIME AND MUCK THAT OOZED UPON A NEWLY BORN PLANET AND GAVE BIRTH TO ITS *FIRST LIFE*...

AND NOW...NOW I FEEL A *STIRRING* BENEATH THE SLIM-MERING QUICKSAND SURFACE...A *SHUDDERING*...A *MIX-ING* AND A *MELTING* AND A *COMBINING*. I FEEL *A HUNDRED BODY-PARTS*...LONG-SINCE DECOMPOSED AND ROTTED AND REDUCED TO JELLIED NOTHINGNESS...*FUSE TOGETHER*...

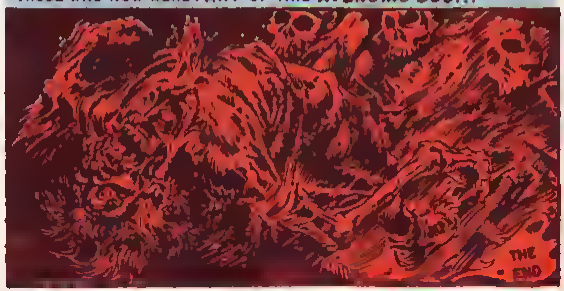
MY HENMIT CHARGE SITS WITHIN MY COB-WEBBED WALLS, STARING STUPIDLY, LICKING HIS CRACKED AND FOUL-SMELLING LIPS, GIGGLING INTERMITTANTLY, AND WAITING FOR THE SUN TO SINK BEHIND THE HANGING CYPRESS TREES TO THE WEST...

WHILE *BELOW*... BELOW MY GREEN FLOORING SPOTTED WITH DRIED GORE... THE QUICKSAND POOL *PULSATES* AND *THROBS*... A *LIVING THING*... A MASS OF *RAVAGED REMAINS* AND *LUMID WHOLES*... *FUSED INTO ONE*.. *REACHING*.. *REACHING UPWARD AND OUTWARD AND AROUND MY STILT LEGS*...

I HAVE *WAITED* FOR THIS DAY. I HAVE WAITED AN *ETERNITY* FOR THIS MOMENT... FOR SOMETHING TO HAPPEN THAT WOULD *FREE ME* FROM THE DEGRADING SHAMEFUL CAREER THAT HAD BEEN *FORCED* UPON ME. I *WELCOME* THE STRAINING UPON MY STILT LEGS... THE CRACKING AND SPLINTERING... THE HEAVING OF THE WEIGHT OF ME RESTING UPON THEM...

I *WELCOME* THEIR FINAL COLLAPSE... AND THEN *MY* THUNDERING COLLAPSE... MY CREAKING, WHINING PLUNGE DOWN INTO THE SUCKING, GULPING, LIVING, QUIVERING POOL... TRAPPING MY LOATHSOME CHARGE *WITHIN* ME...

I *WELCOME MY DESTRUCTION* AND *MY FREEDOM*, AND I WELCOME MY *HIDEOUS SECRET'S FINAL DESTRUCTION, TOO*... AS THE PULSATING POOL THAT HAD ONCE BEEN HIS *PROTECTOR* AND THE FLESH FROM *HIS* BONES AS *HE* HAD ONCE DONE TO *OTHERS*... TO THOSE WHO NOW WERE *PART* OF THIS *AVENGING BOG*...



HEH, HEH! WELL, THAT'S MY *SLIME-SELECTION* FOR THIS ISSUE OF *O.W.'S REEK-RAG! IRVING* (FOR THAT WAS THE SHACKS *NAME*,) JUST *BOGGED DOWN* AFTER THAT. *NEVER WROTE ANOTHER YELP-YARN* FOR MY *CREEPS COLLECTION. ROTTEN SHAME*, I SAY! HAD AN *INTEREST-STORY STYLE!* A LITTLE *WOODEN*.. BUT... WELL... I GUESS *IRVING* WAS JUST A *ONE-STORY SHACK*. WELL, WE'LL ALL SEE YOU *NEXT* IN *MY* MAG, "*TALES FROM THE CRYPT*," AND DON'T FORGET MY *NEW* PEW-PERIODICAL, "*THE CRYPT OF TERROR*" CONTAINING *MORE* OF THE SAME *NAUSEATING NON-SENSE* LIKE *THIS STUFF HERE*. 'BYE, NOW...

The
Old Witch